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Firefawn

Masochistic Maiden

Silently the fawn stepped into the clearing. It's fur dappled with white blended well with the filtered light coming through the aspens. Here, high in the Cascades, the fawn had greeted spring at its birth only a few weeks ago. Now, its legs were strong and its attitude cautious but playful. It stopped for a few seconds and sniffed the mountain air. Mother.. her scent on the breeze...was just across the clearing. There were other scents too...fresh shoots of grass, tempting and new...the deep wet smell of the earth...a sharp scent that he was not familiar with lay almost hidden among the other odors. He hesitated, but wanted so much to run to his Mother and drink deeply of her life giving milk. She had been away for a big part of the early morning grazing in a lower clearing. Now that she was returning he could almost taste the warm rich milk. He remained cautious and took a second step.

His mother stepped into the clearing opposite him. The sun shined tawny and golden on her back and the early grasses hid her tiny feet in a carpet of luscious green. Her head held high she advanced with prancing steps across the clearing. The wind at her back ruffled the hair along her spine. She advanced across the clearing and the fawn began to almost tremble with anticipation. No longer cautious he leaped into the air and landed with his hooves bunched together then sprang upward again. Switching ends in the air he landed facing away from his mother then quickly pivoted on his hind legs to get her back into his sight. She seemed to take forever to cross that clearing.

The wind again brought her scent to him, along with the scent of that pungent but unknown thing. Somehow the scent felt wrong but the fawn had no experience to give him any indication how that scent figured into his world.

His mother was nearly to him now and he frisked across the few steps between them and buried his nose beneath her flank. At that moment his mother caught the faintest hint of the pungent smell that the fawn had noticed. Her large eyes suddenly seemed to be even more alert and her nostrils flared as she turned her head to try and detect the message the scent brought. She had not smelled this smell for a long time but she knew it brought danger. She searched her distant memories...it was not a man smell exactly, but somehow she associated it with man. Pungent and sharp but not strong enough for her to fix. Then the recognition flashed into her...FIRE. The smell was smoke. She and her young fawn were standing knee deep in the dead growth from last years grass. Fire could sweep the understory of shrubs and grasses with terrifying speed. She nudged her fawn and began to move hurriedly away from the smell. Upward...the slopes of the mountains called her.

She began a slow trot toward the upper slopes, angling toward the river. The scent of smoke grew and soon it was not only a scent, but wisps of gray swirled among the trees in the lower canopy when she looked over her shoulder. Other animals had joined into the retreat as she had traveled. Rabbits now dived between her feet. Other deer, elk and a moose with a calf ran full out past her. She picked up her pace to as much as the fawn could handle. Leaping great distances a buck raced past her. Behind them a raging forest fire was growing. It threatened to overtake the sea of life desperately running for the river.

Near the river a lone figure was aware of the coming fire. He had been alerted by the passage of the first few animals and had spotted the smoke high in the air long ago. As he loaded his pack animal and prepared to ford the river he saw that one doe and fawn lagged far behind the other creatures who were preceding the curtain of flames.

The doe reached a point between the tall trees that had been blocked by a downed evergreen. Its trunk stretched far and the upper branches reached as far the other direction. This was not impossible for the doe, she could easily jump the downfall. The fawn however might not make the distance. There was no time left. The doe flew over the barrier and hit the ground at a dead run. The fawn, tired already, leaped but failed to reach the top of the massive trunk. it ran left, then right, but there was no way around. It leaped again and again. The smoke of the fire began to fill the space between the tree tops and darken the world where the fawn was trapped between a wall of fire and a wall of unyielding trunk.

The doe fled when the smoke and heat became too great. She reached the river and plunged to the other side. A cascade of various creatures flowed over the banks and to safety across the river.

The lone man also crossed the river and was filled with sorrow when he did not see the fawn alongside the doe as she pulled herself from the water. There was no way he could return to the flames to rescue the fawn. The evergreens were fully ignited and their heat was easily felt even across the wide river. Running Buck lead his horse and pack pony away from the heat. He'd be a few days late getting back from his hunting trip due to the fire, but it would save him miles to wait for it to cool some and cut through the burnout to his village to the west. He hoped the fire had not disturbed the village or made the tribe move to a new site.

During the night a hard rain began to fall. It ran down the roof of Running Buck's lean-to in heavy rivers, but it would put out the raging fire and begin to cool the ground. Maybe Running Buck would not be so late.

Early in the morning a stand of blackened giants and charred earth was all that greeted Running Buck as he forded the river and began his journey homeward. The trail he was following lead about 30 yards from the downfall that had stopped the fawn. Remembering its panicked eyes, Running Buck was again touched by sadness. He turned his pony toward the last spot he saw the fawn and decided to ride to the spot to say goodbye and ease its spirit into Summerland and maybe collect its pelt for a pair of moccasins for his daughter.

He rode along the massive trunk, once, twice, and did not see the fawn. Just as he was about to turn away he noticed a hollow under a part of the log. He dismounted and carefully approached the hollow. When he peered into the darkness beneath the massive trunk, a tiny hoof was about all he could make out. Figuring the frightened animal had forced itself under the trunk moments before dying of smoke and heat, Running Buck grabbed the hoof to draw the animal out. The pelt should be a good one without any charring.

Suddenly the tiny hoof gave a jerk. The fawn was still alive but trapped beneath the log. it had rammed itself so far into the interior that it could not back out on its own. Running Buck pulled hard on the kicking hoof until a smoke streaked, terrified body came into view. He slipped a length of leather cord around the fawn's neck before he freed it from the hollow.

Once out from under the massive trunk the fawn tried to spring away from Running Buck, but the leather around its neck held it fast. Soon it stood meekly, breathing hard but resigned to being held. Its tongue hung from the corner of its lips and a light foam followed the upper curve of its mouth. Running Buck decided that any animal who survived

the fire must be blessed by the spirits and that he would not use this animals pelt, but instead would take it back to the village and give it to his daughter as a pet.

He lashed the fawn to the pack frame on his pack pony and rode off toward his village. The fire had left a ugly scar across the foothills, but fortunately had not reached as far as the quiet valley where his tribe were camped.

Arriving in the village, Running Buck went first to his family's site and entered the teepee. The lifting of the flap let golden sunshine spill into the interior. His daughter and wife looked up. Little dove, his daughter jumped up suddenly to greet him and sent a bowl of colored beads scattering at her feet from the beading she had been working on. Running Buck swept her into his arms with quick loving hands and told her about the great fire...he told her about the fawn not being able to leap the high tree trunk and being left by its mother. Tears of sorrow came to Little Doves eyes as he described the scene. He turned and carried Little Dove out to the waiting ponies and showed her the fawn who was still alive.

Little Does looked at the tiny body with its spotted fur, and the big brown eyes and pink tongue and thought it was the most beautiful animal she had ever seen. Running Buck lifted the fawn down and tied it to the side of the teepee. He left Little Dove to get aquatinted with her new friend and went to prepare an animal bladder as a nursing bag for the fawn. The tribe had several ponies giving milk for their foals. Perhaps the fawn could be raised on their milk. He filled the bladder with warm mare's milk and carried it back to Little Dove.

She sat on the ground with the fawn gathered into her lap like a puppy stroking its tiny ears and scratching the fur between its eyes. Already the fawn was becoming accustomed to her gentle touch. She took the bladder full of milk and stuck the end of the protruding spout between her fingers so that the fawn could suck on her fingers and draw milk from the bladder. At first it turned away from the strange scent of the mare's milk, but finally thirst overcame its fear and it began to suck.

"Well," said Running Buck, "It looks like your young friend may make it. Perhaps you should name it now."

"I already have." responded Little Dove. "I will call it Firefawn, because he came from the fire."

Firefawn grew into a strong young buck during the summer he spent with the tribe and made so many friends among the tribe that they kept him with the ponies over the winter.

When spring came again and it was time to let Firefawn return to the wild. Running Buck made him a bright red collar of leather so that none of the tribe would accidentally shoot him as he grazed among the trees. For many years the deer with the red collar was seen by members of the tribe and whenever they saw him they knew their hunt would be successful. Firefawn became the lead buck of a large herd of deer.

Running Buck and Little Dove's kindness returned to help feed the tribe for many winters.

So in life, all that we do returns to us. Good for good and bad for bad. Let good be what returns to your life.

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